

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

21 January 1959

SUBJECT: SNIE 66-59: TRENDS IN THE PHILIPPINES

(Staff Draft for Board Consideration)

1. The most recent estimate on the Philippines* presented a gloomy outlook of corruption, opportunism and irresponsibility under the Garcia administration and brought out the possibility of continuing loss of Philippine public confidence in their government institutions. The estimate also highlighted the likelihood of increased pressures for a more independent foreign policy, the genuine and growing nationalist sentiment in the country, and the possibility that Philippine nationalism might take on an increasingly anti-American coloration if outstanding US-Philippine issues were not successfully settled.

2. We see no reason now to alter these estimates or the basic thrust of SNIE 66-58. However, several recent developments have further clouded the domestic Philippine scene and increased the difficulties in maintaining smooth US-Philippine relations.

*SNIE 66-58: "The Outlook for the Philippine Republic," 27 May 1958

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3. The political situation has continued to degenerate. The government, under Garcia's administration, has declined in efficiency and has lacked a program to retain public support. It has failed to establish a rapport with the general public, and the spirit of trust and confidence which Magsaysay had generated among the common people is now largely gone, replaced by cynicism and drift. The Garcia administration is now largely discredited in the public mind.

4. Stimulated by the growing popular discontent with the political and economic situation, the opposition Liberal and Progressive Parties, led by Vice President Magapagal and by Manahan, have stepped up negotiation pointed toward a merger or a coalition. Some Nacionalista politicians, conscious of the weakness of the Garcia government, have shown interest in associating themselves with the opposition parties. If the negotiations are successful opposition prospects for the Senatorial and local elections scheduled for the fall of 1959 and for the Presidential elections in 1961 would be greatly improved.

5. Faced with growing opposition and a lack of public support, Garcia and his followers have become increasingly sensitive to real or imagined threats to their positions. In the fall of 1958,

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various political groups capitalized on this sensitivity to advance their own positions by spreading rumors of a military coup to be led by Secretary of National Defense, General Vargas, who seemed, at least to some Philippine politicians, to be following in the footsteps of Magsaysay. The coup incident undoubtedly weakened the position and influence of Vargas and, although recent reports have stated that Garcia is now convinced that the coup rumors were false and that he would like to retain Vargas, it now appears probable that Vargas will in time be removed from his cabinet post. Furthermore, the affair damaged the prestige of the military in general and enhanced the possibility that the Department of Defense and, in time, the armed forces may become subject to political manipulation.

6. There is evidence of increased covert political activity on the part of the Philippine Communist Party to foster dissatisfaction with existing ties between the Philippines and the United States. Exploiting Philippine nationalist sentiment, the Communist Party appears to have increased its influence in intellectual, student, and labor circles. An alarming indication of potential Communist political influence are reports of a significant Communist role in the recent spreading of the military coup rumors which weakened the position of the anti-Communist military leaders.

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7. The economic situation has failed to improve, and in some respects has worsened. During 1958, the rate of growth in both the agricultural and industrial sectors of the economy appears to have declined to a level barely exceeding the rapid rate of population growth of about 2.9 percent. The rise in world metals prices and the favorable outlook for crop yields in 1959 forecast an improvement in this situation. The Philippine economy will continue to suffer from a critical shortage of foreign exchange reserves and mounting inflationary pressures. The Garcia administration has taken steps to cut the budget deficit, curtail imports and control credit; however, it has lacked the political strength and determination to press its "austerity" program. The imbalance of payments remains critical; and the administration faces the basic problem of financing the level of capital goods and raw materials necessary to continued economic expansion. Economic controls, and the general inefficiency of the government's administration of them, have increased the incentive for corruption, raised the profitability of imports, and attracted investment to import ventures rather than to foreign-exchange earning export industries. The Garcia administration continues to oppose general programs of devaluation and decontrol. Instead, it has indicated

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its intention to propose to the forthcoming session of the Philippine Congress a foreign exchange tax (which amounts to partial devaluation) to discourage imports and raise revenues.

8. In seeking issues to strengthen its position and to gain public support the Garcia administration has turned increasingly to growing Philippine nationalism and to US-Philippine relations. Administration spokesmen, and others as well, have become increasingly vocal and insistent in publicly expounding Philippine grievances against the US. Although many of these grievances are based upon widespread nationalist convictions, they are being inflated for domestic political purposes.

9. The Philippines feel that it has not received as generous economic aid as it deserves as a loyal friend and ally of the US. Garcia undoubtedly hoped to obtain large-scale financial assistance during his visit to the US in June 1958. Although he did receive prospective credits of \$125 million, this was considerably less than Garcia believed he would get and less than the administration had led the Philippine people to expect. Moreover, there have been delays in negotiating the credits he did receive and those credits do not provide the kind of assistance necessary to stabilize the Philippine balance of payments position.

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10. Another grievance concerns the amount and type of US military assistance, which the Philippines believes does not meet its minimum security needs. Both military and civilian leaders have been disappointed that their full demands for increased military assistance following the Taiwan Strait crisis have not been met. They are concerned with the Philippine role in US strategic plans in the event of war in the Far East.

11. Important Philippine political and commercial leaders feel that the provisions of the 1955 Revised Trade Agreement fail to protect the paramount economic interests of Philippine nationals in the development of the country's natural resources. In part this is a logical consequence of increasingly vocal economic nationalism and the growing desire, especially on the part of business and industrial leaders, to maximize Philippine ownership and management of the economy.

12. Another grievance stems from an increasing concern that certain provisions of the Military Bases Agreement, particularly concerning criminal jurisdiction are a violation of Philippine sovereignty. Philippine leaders argue that the existing agreement is, in important respects, less favorable than provisions in US

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similar arrangements with other countries. The present preliminary talks, which began in November 1958, are stalemated on the question of criminal jurisdiction which caused the breakdown of the 1956 negotiations.

13. The Garcia administration has often deliberately magnified these grievances in hopes of exploiting public nationalistic emotions. Because of its declining political strength, the administration is now unwilling to risk taking a strong stand against pressures for further agitation of these issues, and it appears to have created a situation which it might not be able to control.

14. The outlook for the Philippine government over the next year or so is for continuing corruption, irresponsibility, and ineffectiveness under the Garcia administration. Public dissatisfaction will probably continue to grow, but we believe it will tend to result in apathy rather than public unrest or widespread anti-administration demonstrations. The political situation will probably become increasingly unstable as individuals and groups within the Nacionalista Party, as well as the opposition parties, maneuver for position. The Liberal and

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Progressive parties will probably agree to some form of co-operation before the Senatorial and local elections next fall, and will probably win a sufficient number of key elections to further weaken the administration. Although the economic situation may improve in some respects, the shortage of foreign exchange will probably continue as a major problem. We do not believe that the Garcia administration will have courage or political power to take effective corrective measures.

15. Given this generally dismal outlook on the domestic scene, we believe that the present clamor over Philippine grievances against the US will probably increase. It is likely that the Garcia Administration may feel forced to make some form of formal representations to the US government for redress of these grievances. There will probably be increased Philippine efforts to expand contacts with other non-Communist nations with the intent of improving its general international status and demonstrating a more independent foreign policy and decreased dependence upon the US.

16. There will undoubtedly be increasing public discussion of neutralism and of the hazards and problems of mutual security. Although much of the present and recent conduct of the Philippine

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government and of special interest groups can be explained as a maneuver to put pressure on the US for increased financial support, there is the possibility that the maneuver may get out of hand because of the emotional tendencies of many Philippine leaders and the rapid growth of Philippine nationalism, especially in the urban centers and among intellectuals, youth, businessmen, and labor. Communist activity will probably increase and be directed primarily toward stimulating the growth of anti-colonial and anti-American ingredients in Philippine nationalism.

17. Although we believe that the course of US-Philippine relations over the next year or so will be rough indeed, we do not believe that the Philippines will leave or alter the basic framework of the overall alliance with the US. Economic, political, military, and historic ties are still strong. Moreover, there is still considerable confidence and trust in the US in the Philippine countryside and among the general voting public, as demonstrated in the recent Presidential elections. We continue to believe it unlikely that the Philippines will take action which would seriously jeopardize the current status and operations of US military bases over the next year or so.

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However, the bases will continue to be used as a lever in negotiating other issues with the US, and, if over a period of time, there is no satisfactory resolution of the Philippine grievances it is possible that some steps may be taken to complicate effective US use of the bases. This would be more likely if the current degree of political instability continues over the next two or three years.

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